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SMALL BIRD MY HEART

By

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English and French B.A., Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington, 2007

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in Creative Writing, Poetry

The University of Montana  
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## **DEDICATION**

For Cecilia Muktoyuk

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## Prologue

*At the other side of the universe, right now, looking back at earth, you would not see earth as it is today. You would see the past lights of earth, perhaps species long since extinct. The past is visible in the sky. The lights we see from earth set out from their stars years ago. We are not seeing the universe as it is, but as it was when it set out to meet us.*

---

In which, small-bird-my-heart longs to see her beloved's image. She travels to the edge of earth's galaxy to see her beloved's images transmitted through space. Before her beloved's images arrive, small-bird-my-heart knows Kennedy's presidential transmissions will arrive, heralding the age of space travel, of attempts to contact alien life. She learns she can see her beloved's form without her transmitter. Her beloved, while she lived, was bathed in the sun's light. If small-bird-my-heart can travel out to a place in the universe where the light of those times has not reached yet, she will see them. She travels out to wait for her beloved's images to arrive. hawk-claw watches small-bird-my-heart and tries to reason with her.

**small-bird-my-heart at the edge of earth's galaxy**

I wait for my beloved's signal, TV  
receptor around my neck

beyond this, asteroids.  
pressure against the force  
of somethingness invisible.

I wait for the thin  
signal to fuzz, to gray,  
to black-and-white, to color  
years of recorded time,  
to finally repeat her image.



## **hawk-claw responds**

depths of time spread out  
along long lengths  
making visible past lights  
sure to burn too brightly  
in their resounding atomic  
sharpness extinguishing  
the essential center of  
all things together

## **Roughly for the North**

I am beginning to think I want to live like you,  
to take up this dead swan with two brown arms  
to carry the swooning body to the chopping block  
to lay it down, the elegant arch of its white body  
stops my heart.

I prod its heart beneath its feathers, stilled—  
the tongue out of the orange beak  
is black with things it should have sung.

Vainamoinen sang into existence a boat  
to sail North. In seeking this magic he destroyed

a flock of swans. Did they look like this?  
Did the long line of their spines arch like this?  
I wish I were a dancer to let lines fall like that.  
But I am dressed like you, roughly for the North.

Is my hand strong as your blue-veined hand?  
So I may take up the red hatchet  
to chop off the wing with one strike,  
to unbalance the bird, and broken,  
do I sing its death song for you?

Holding a white wing in hand  
you stand from your stooping  
the line of your back quilted by a blue overcoat.  
Do I remember this or is this all conjecture  
or conjure? But here you hand the wing to me,

and there, you keep the swan wing at your side.  
I am mute with complexities, and I want words, as you  
kneeling before the stove sweep away ashes  
with the long pinioned wing.

As you move sand with the bowed span of feathers  
into a dustpan you empty  
by the chopping block, I realize,  
Auka, I seek a song for you,  
so I lift the hatchet and let it fall.

**small-bird-my-heart does not hear**

how far away they look,  
the planets. his image is the first to come through,  
I know. Kennedy speaking,  
but so far, just silence.  
humans invisible.

they are reaching out  
from earth, those presidential messages,  
sound falling behind

will they be heard by anyone  
but me

**hawk-claw eyes small-bird-my-heart's transistor**

she feathers out, how like a bird  
she—on that small island—lived on rocky cliff.  
blue air reached down to press each green  
and settled itself into ice.

**small-bird-my-heart examining her transistor**

I felt your eye tug  
at this bauble,  
hawk-claw, that look dug  
deep, unsettled me.

why now, planets  
flickering in and out,  
Pluto's clump—gray rock and ice,  
dark, cold, the sun a small yellow stone,  
why tell me now this grasping will not work?  
that this is junk and we are here,  
cocooned in gray particles, my ears  
trained on static?

## **The Welcome Dance**

When they first arrive  
in from the cold  
their cheeks still rosy with the glow,  
they will talk,  
then the men in white

kuspuks will move  
to the front, pick up their drums, and start to sing.  
It's the singing that will call  
the women forward  
in their lush and gorgeous floral

prints and the young boys with the propane  
scars around their mouths  
and the women old  
with arthritis  
and cancer  
and lupus  
and the girls pox-  
marked and the young  
women TB bled and the drunk who flipped  
fifty feet into the creek bottom  
and the young men whose froze  
in the blizzard  
on the ice  
60 miles from Siberia.

The men in white kuspuks will sing  
the Welcome Dance  
because everyone can dance  
the Welcome Dance and everyone is welcome  
and they will dance and they will be serious  
about their dancing—their arms will welcome them all into the evening.

## **hawk-claw tries again**

you know the universe  
you know its records are made of light  
I can read all times, but you—  
only if you are in the right places,  
the right distance for light to travel those times  
those ages past reaching out

the light of the earth  
reaches out across  
the universe, reaches  
everywhere with time  
every moment reaching  
somewhere now  
and now

**small-bird-my-heart**

will her images come through in transmission?

she was a small bird  
each berry beaked  
bright against her dark sheen

each willow leaf caked green  
that sharp beak edge



## Aqpik

At the Mouth of the Eldorado and Flambeau Rivers

Lagoon rises black with seaweed  
and sallowly retracts, wind rises  
salt-scented, the islanders scream on their rocks  
and rise on white wings. Nobody talks,  
gazing salmonberries divine an end,  
the orange berries musk the air.  
Shrunken pumpkin patch, tongue-soft berries  
stick to bucket sides. Sky sits on the horizon  
and watches cloudberry fall into blue pails.

On the river-far hill, brown backs bend and rise.  
Perhaps the blind ghost comes near,  
the leaves grow brittle, reindeer  
thrash wildly toward water,  
thunder and a terrific splash.  
Raising looking-glass, the far backs transform  
into birds, rise up on long wings,  
long dances, long necks, long.

Feathered belly only bullet  
stops. The dark V flight.  
Crane my father killed we kept the feet from,  
totems of fright. We watched bird bodies  
knowing, smooth against bellies, long legs pressed.  
Sand hills leap with some light  
leaping arms cannot grasp or feel.

She's flying somewhere,  
her thin arms rise, lift and fall  
lift and fall into what sky?  
One last view, her rock island,  
she rises like breath exhaling,  
exhaling, and never catch stop.

What skin touching skin in the first  
home of her love will she wake to? Her body will settle  
into his sleeping shoulder while gulls cry.

I'm so dizzy and then the waking ache,  
somewhere a spider crawls, tapioca sack  
to a black-star back, long-hair legs  
play lichen marrow keys, forward and back.

It will take a long time to find her,  
she will wander over tundra picking berries,  
she will not notice me but she is all I see  
flowered *ugithkok* sky. Her fingers fumble,  
the orange globe slips down to me.

\*\*\*\*\*

Everything is pushing forward but the sea  
who sighs retouching what it left, and leaving  
leaves again. The sea belly slides pitted, pimped, gored,  
clatter-scrape rocks through shift and slip,  
scoots through motors  
rust mangled, toss-entangled  
dump heap. The sea sweats  
arcane washer machines,  
fat men leg-tripped, white  
barrel bodies, leg sticks straight,  
mosquitoes net breaks.  
Calder mobile coffee spit.

\*\*\*\*\*

## Swim Across

My Auka watches from the cabin  
window my cousin's brown body plunge  
into the cold. A singing starts. The host of jellyfish,  
veined pink, quaver, they will not sting. Our driftwood sticks  
swirl their translucent tremblings.  
I know Auka will take us in dripping,  
staring gray-cloud eyes.

She wets thread in her mouth. The light  
comes through the window, almond  
fingernails and baby-powder scent,  
the worn quilt and stained sheet.  
She smiles distantly and moves  
small-body grace. Beside her, Julie's red  
candles rest unburned, Auka stokes the wood stove.

The table-cloth is rolled in the corner. The worn towels hang  
stiffly above the stove. We will rub the water from  
our hair and icy drops from our faces. The sand  
will crumble from our feet, the sand will settle  
into linoleum cracks, Auka will sweep most out the door.

The far bank recedes into muddy  
grasses. I step into the water,  
minnows shadow dart out from the rocks, the small boat  
grates against the shore, the yellow-rope reflection sways,  
cousin calls my name, his seal-head bobs,  
the water reaches my calf, I turn to look  
at the cabin window, and she's gone.

\*\*\*\*\*

Holy Mother, if I begin to pray—  
bow-spray seas salmon-shine, the silent tern sails on,  
plankton swarm, broom-sweep baleen,  
the slick slick slick paddle.  
Barnacles cling molar beautiful,  
the white stars sweep blue-whale skin,  
Our Lady of the Bering Sea.

Auka's Catholic radio station drones  
sleepily in the sun, her brown fingers  
stitch coarse seal-skin.

**hawk-claw**

in waves of light  
her image  
laps the universe

**small-bird-my-heart resolves herself**

I will travel out from here,  
I will go to where the beginning  
is visible, dawn of earth's sun,  
the earth compiling itself  
drawing its hot matter together.  
I will watch its birth,  
the light of earth's ancient ages  
will reach me there, at that far distance.

## Blue Cabin

The driftwood rack hangs barren,  
the fish do not hang in long, low rows  
impossible to walk beneath without brushing  
the orange flesh, translucent as cut glass  
and dripping amber oil. The blue cabin is quiet,  
the swan wing broom and the sand still  
on the linoleum floor.

Inside, flies bounce on the windows  
with no one to let them out.  
Outdoors, the flies do not buzz  
close to the fish rack, their maggot hatchery,  
though there is no wind to keep them away from fish,  
there are no fish this year.

Auka I'm sorry I'm away  
at school, while you grow old, trapped  
in a small house fifty miles from camp,  
in a town without fish racks, sitting beside Aupa  
in the kitchen eating last year's fish,  
half-dried and boiled.

I should be home, watching you  
cut fish, ulu in hand at the cutting table,  
stained with black blood and slippery.  
I should be trying to cut fish heads off.  
The ulu unmanageable in my inexperienced hand  
would slide back and forth as I tried to find the place

between the gills and body, to bear down upon  
the spine. It's hard to crack it,  
and the bloodline bisected would gush over me,  
as it did the one day we stood there, my mother,  
her sister, you and I. You laughed,  
we all laughed as the black blood

slid down my pink windbreaker.  
With the ulu I traced the backbone:  
horizontal jagged cuts yanked  
meat from bones. Ragged and mashed fillets,  
laughter and stories from mother of mangled fillets  
while you laughed without stories  
as you found the place between the gills and the body.



As you broke the spine, the blood did not  
flow over you. As you unzipped from white bones  
the orange flesh, it landed heavily in your hand.

Auka, I write the same thing, over and over.

## **Landmarks to Camp**

Hanson's or the A.C. Store

We pick up snacks for the road. It always felt like such a long drive to camp, an hour on a dirt road, through pot holes. If it was a dry summer, then through dust. If it rained, then through mud.

## The Nome-Beltz High school

The last building on our left on our way out of town. Mom went there for school and wouldn't let us go. She homeschooled me for a couple of years and then we went to boarding school for the rest of high school.

## The Shooting Range

Sometimes we'd stop. Dad would sight in his guns and Calvin and Chris would target practice. Us girls were always bored by this stop. We'd go looking in the creek for minnows or throw rocks into the culvert the creek ran through. There are so many bullet casings on the ground that once when I was building myself a dollhouse, I collected a bunch of them to make into doll cups. Dad helped me saw off the rounded tips so they'd look more like cups.

## The Snake River Bridge

We used to know someone who lived out here, I forgot who they were. Sometimes during moose hunting season we take a boat up river from the mouth of the Snake to the bridge. We pick berries along the river banks and fish. We've never shot a bull along the river, never found one. We've picked a lot of blueberries.

We found a good patch of nagoon berries near an old A-frame. Nagoons are hard to find, they're small red berries that taste like raspberries. The scent first alerts you that you've come upon a patch of nagoon berries. The scent of raspberries floats up from the tundra and you look down and there's a carpet of green leaves and small red berries. The A-frame still has camp supplies in it from its old occupants. The canvas from the tent is wind-torn. Inside there is an enamel washbasin, a bunch of cheap silverware, a cot, and camp stove, with little odds and ends scattered around the tent.

Once Dad spotted a huge bull moose on the Snake River from the road, it was only a few hours from sunset. He drove into town, called up Uncle Harry and they put the canoe on the top of our Tercel and drove out to the Snake River Bridge and floated down the river to look for it. They didn't find it. It was past 2 a.m. by the time they got back. Dad was really tired and had to go to work the next day.

We went ice-fishing for trout on the Snake River one winter. Dad made us all fishing sticks. Sticks that look like shuttles, with the fishing line threaded on them like we're going to weave something. He made a big ice chopper from an old piece of iron. He made an ice scoop to keep the holes clear. We had fun fishing and we ate fresh trout in the middle February.

It was the winter when Mom made us girls parkas and we were all out there in our parkas on the river fishing for trout. Mom is really good at ice-fishing. She'd always have the most fish at the end of the day. Five or six. It was so cold that when we'd pull the fish out of the water, they'd freeze to death on top of the ice, we didn't have to cut their heads off.

## Penny River

We see a lot of moose in the Penny River Valley. Five or six cow moose like to winter there. There is a lot of brush for them to hide in in the summer and to eat in the winter. We saw a bear once near the riverbed, a golden grizzly. It stood up on its rear legs, snuffed the air, and ran down to the river and we couldn't see it anymore.

One fall, when the pink salmon were spawning in the river, the Johnson family and our family were out by the Penny River. All eight of us kids were in the river chasing the salmon, seeing if we could catch them. The river is shallow for the most part. At first, we tried to keep from getting wet. We kept from going in the deeper areas where the water could go over our rubber boots. Then Kathy, one of the Johnsons, tripped and fell in. She looked up at her mom, all soaking wet, and her mom just shrugged. That was the sign we could get as wet as we wanted. We chased the salmon and caught them with our bare hands. Kathy caught the biggest one, a big male with a huge hump on his shoulder.

## The Rock Outcroppings Where We Saw a Bear Scratching Its Back

Coming out of the Penny River Valley there is a hill with big outcroppings. These rocks are grey and look like someone just dropped them on top of the hill. Once we saw a bear scratching its back against the big rocks.

## House Rock

Beyond the outcroppings Where We Saw a Bear Scratching Its Back the road circles round a hillside and starts descending into another valley. On the top of the back side of the hill is a rock called House Rock. It looks like a little square house with a triangle roof. The story goes that *izhigoks* live in the House Rock. *Izhigoks* are little green men in Inupiaq tales. When I was little, I was really scared of meeting them. In one story I heard about the *izhigoks* they make a line and if you walk between them you end up in a different world. One of my grade school friends claims she saw some once when she was playing hide and seek near her cabin. She said she went out looking for her friends and she saw a little old woman who was holding a little old baby in her arms, they were both green, she said she got scared, screamed and ran away.



## Cripple Creek

We drove up Cripple Creek one dry summer. We explored a valley we couldn't see from the road. Hidden in the valley is old mining equipment. A dredge and a lot of rusting metal machines and weather-worn wooden objects now indiscernible. It was a bumpy drive. The glacial boulders are rounded but large and hard to navigate around.

## The Hillside with the Best Blueberry Patch

Dad came home one day from moose hunting and said he saw the best blueberry patch he'd ever seen in his life. The berries needed a few more days to ripen. The next weekend, Dad, Mom, my sister Catherine and I got in the truck and drove over to the hillside, it's near the Sinuk River Valley. We hiked up the hillside. It didn't seem like it would be the sight of the best berry patch, the tundra was dry and the berry bushes we saw on the way up were barren. The tundra moss crackled under our feet. We kept climbing. Finally we got there. It was an oasis of moisture on an otherwise dry hill. The berries were so thick that if we stepped in error, we'd squish a mat of berries. It didn't take us long to pick three gallons.

## The Sinuk River Valley

Mom always says *the Sig-nuk*. It's how it's pronounced in Inupiaq. People drive out to the Sinuk River Bridge to fish for red and silver salmon. Beneath the bridge, the river runs deep and clear, you can see the salmon swimming as dark shadows.

The thing is you can't really make red salmon bite. But the Sinuk River is about 30 miles out of town so the Fish and Game aren't often there to see the reds getting force-fed.

Sometimes people go out to the Sinuk and jump off the bridge and swim. The river is ice-cold, and I've never jumped off the bridge. My brother Calvin has, he has always been crazy.

Dad shot his 60" bull in the Sinuk River Valley. He was on the western hillside glassing over the eastern hillside and he said he saw something shining, gleaming in the brush. He looked and looked at it until he realized it was a moose rack. He was out there hunting by himself that day, he'd taken a few days off of work and Calvin was at work at the seafood plant. Dad drove over to the bridge to the eastern hillside, hiked over a mile through the brush, hoping he was going in the right direction. He got within sight of the bull without it smelling him. He shot it. He said after he shot it, it ran before it died. He had to chase it. He was worried he would lose it in the brush. He said he was following its deep huffing breaths through the brush. It died on lying on its stomach. It was such a big bull that he couldn't turn it over to gut it. He had to cut off its legs before he could turn it over. He hauled out some of the meat on his back and came into town and borrowed a friend's 4-wheeler to haul out the rest of it.

The Johnsons have a berry patch on the western hillside. People are very territorial about their berry patches. It's against the moral code to pick at a person's berry patch unless they've invited you to pick there with them once before. After that it's a shared berry patch. You just can't pick in a spot because you've seen people picking there before, it'd be like stealing. We can pick at that berry patch because the Johnsons invited us to pick there with them once.

Along the hillside from the Johnsons' berry patch to the north is a little valley where my Aupa saw a wolverine once. He always tells us the story of how he saw a wolverine there in January when he was driving to camp by himself.

Along the hillside from the berry patch to the south my brother Calvin chased three moose through the brush only to realize that they were all cows.

One summer when the Sinuk River was high, we boated down the river almost all the way to the mouth of the river. That summer the fires in the Interior cast a thick haze of smoke over the whole Seward Peninsula. It was the summer over 200 thousand square miles burned. The sky was lavender for weeks; the sun through the haze was pink. When we boated down the Sinuk River we couldn't really see the mountains on either side of the river. They are supposed to be very beautiful, but I still haven't seen them. We picked *aqpiks* on the riverbank near the sea before turning back upriver.

## The Feather River

The Feather River feeds into the Woolley Lagoon. The Feather River Bridge has a lot of blackberry mats around it. I grew up thinking that there was only one kind of blackberry, the crowberry, as it is called in other places. The blackberries in the south are nothing like the crowberries. Crowberries are small, black, and round. They don't have much flavor, but they are sweet. Their skins are kind of thick and their seeds are gritty. They taste best after the first frost. My Auka liked to pick a lot of them. They are easily picked with a berry comb because of their thick skins. They don't burst or squish between the berry comb tines as easily as blueberries do. Auka liked to eat the blackberries mixed with *akpiks* in Eskimo ice-cream. A dish of reindeer fat mixed with snow and berries and a little sugar.

There is a clean-up site along the Feather River. Old equipment from building the road rusted out there, leaked fuel oil and dirty grease into the river bank. When I worked for BLM for one summer, some clean-up specialists came up from Anchorage and scooped up dirt and put it into big one-ton bags. There were 34 one-ton bags of dirt excavated. They're still sitting there because they can't afford to ship them out on one of the barges out of Nome.

Dad salvaged some of the iron from the clean-up site before it got cleaned up. He took his welder and a generator out there one summer and cut off a lot of metal from a big metal conoid object. He used the metal to make a boat trailer.

We've barbequed out at the Feather River a number of times. We have a barbeque pit made out of large glacial rocks.

## Livingston Creek

Livingston Creek is pretty small, but over the years it has melted its way deeper into its permafrost banks. The creek is sinking deep into the ground. The permafrost calves its way into the hole the creek is making for itself. The permafrost is melting because the road runs right next to the creek for about a mile. The road collects heat from the sun and helps the creek melt itself deeper every year. Sometimes you can see the permafrost's ice layer—a two to three foot sheet of ice between tundra and dirt—as the top crumbles off.

Usually at Livingston Creek Mom tells the story about how when she was little going out to camp, she and her brothers in sisters would have a creek and river naming contest with bubble gum prizes for those who got it right. She says they'd name the creeks before they got to the signs.

3870'

The last big landmark on the way out to camp is 3870'. It's one of the tallest mountains on the Seward Peninsula. At the base of the mountain is the King Islanders' drinking-water creek. We haul the water down to camp in 5 gallon buckets. Everybody fantasizes about climbing 3870'. Uncle Harry climbed it with a group of young men when he was in his 20s. Calvin climbed it with his friends one summer. On the top of the mountain is an old repeater housed in a little radio house. On a clear day, as the road descends off of the foothills of 3870', you can sometimes see King Island. When Aupa sees King Island he always says, "Ah hey!" He always smiles, and pointing, says, "It's a clear day, you can see her today!"

The base of 3870' is marked by large glacial boulders. They are all rounded, some glint with mica. When we were smaller we could pee behind them. In the spring, between the boulders in the thin soil grow flowers. They are scrappy. They grow tough leaves and tough stems, and atop the tough green stems are fragile, translucent, yellow petals. The petals are so thin you can read your fingerprint through them. When we'd go out to camp in the spring, I liked to pick these flowers and bring them to my Auka. She and my Aupa would say, "Ayagaduk, wow, you brought us flowers." When we were missing the short flowers' season, they'd say, "Ayagaduk, you have to come out to camp to pick us flowers."

## The Woolley Road

The Woolley Road used to be much worse than it is now. Mom says she remembers when it was just a bunch of glacial rocks all the way down—five miles of bone-jarring bumps. Every few years the King Island Native Corporation gets together enough money to fix the road. Mom is part of the King Island board. She says that she and the rest of the board went to a conference in Las Vegas where they learned about what rights they had to corporation money. She said they learned they have a right to more transportation money than the larger Kawerak Corporation was letting them have. She said it was really empowering when their board went to the Kawerak president and said they wanted their money to redo the Woolley Road. She said the look on the president's face was priceless—malignant. But she had to give in because it was true; the King Islanders deserved that money.

A lot of the land around the Woolley Road is owned by King Islanders. A lot of King Islanders got their Native Allotments in this area. Aupa has a section, I looked it up on the BLM land-use maps.

The Woolley Road has a lot of washouts. The drinking-water creek runs along side of the road most of the way down to the lagoon. Sometimes it crosses the road. The creek culverts get clogged with ice in the winter and come spring, the creek water has to go somewhere. It usually goes over the road, ripping through the gravel, washing it all away.

## The Woolley Lagoon

The Woolley Lagoon separates the mainland from the sand spit where a lot of King Islanders have their summer fish camps. There are a few cabins on the mainland. Though recently, a number of these cabins have been ransacked by marauding bears.

The King Islanders have used Woolley Lagoon as a summer fish camp from time immemorial (it's such a funny phrase, but what else should I say, a really, really, really, really, really, really, long time?). Traditionally, the King Islanders lived on King Island in the winter. They hunted seals, walrus, and occasionally whales from the island in the winter. In the summer, after the sea ice left, they'd take their *umiaqs* and go over to Woolley and set up their nets to fish for salmon. Nowadays, we have cabins out on the spit. They're all small little cabins. Behind the cabins are fish racks where we dry fish.

The reason why a lot of King Islanders built their cabins on the spit is because it is separated from the mainland by 50 feet of water. There isn't a bridge to the other side. There are two ropes that go across the water and there are little dingys that ferry King Islanders across from one side to the other. It keeps the tourists out of the fish camp. If you don't know someone on the spit, no one will come out of their cabins to come get you. When a strange car drives down the Woolley road, we all go in our cabins and wait inside until we figure out if we know the people. If we don't, then we just wait inside till the people get tired of waiting to see if someone will give them a ride across the lagoon.

Once, a man who married into the King Island Community tried to bring his tourists business to the fish camp. He'd bring down a van of people, bring them across, so they could see "an authentic Native fish camp." It pissed everybody off and they made him quit bringing the tourists over.



**at that far distance—hawk-claw**

how far we are, small-bird-my-heart, from all our kind.  
cataclysmic light careens into darkness,  
cosmic bruising wrenches radiance cold.  
pollen swarms, billows, spawns light. rock throttles  
rock, smashes into wheels  
of force—darkness gathers itself  
into itself, fury, rage, gall compressed, compacting,  
then torques out brawling, swallows  
sharp stars, breaks its mouth,  
ravaged, roaring, explodes into punches  
of sonic destruction, how the universe  
bellows—unsettled by its own gorged presence—  
hurls itself anarchic, ruthless, unfurling barbarous existence  
into nothing, that what was before.

**at that far distance—small-bird-my-heart**

my feathers smoke, star-rock singed,  
red embers still smolder  
in their dark forests.  
my vision shimmers—colossal orbs  
waver on the cusp of collision,  
low-pitched—a tremor—spheres pulse  
sonic—and the sight—like cells,  
soft edges slipping, impacting—and the whump  
whump whump—is there still sound after  
burst, after detonation, after volley, after volley.

These are forgotten words I want to remember  
deft knife, the scent of  
  aren't we  
lost  
       I choose them  
                                they're made of  
cold sand-blood, we're still  
  a small animal  
a plastic bag, a seal pup. I'm made of them—  
riverbank caribou—the women in the cabin  
believe this is the word I want. Maybe I've never  
been here  
                                as much as  
fossil grass in the creek  
                                the road eating  
hulled ribcage and hefting  
  these words  
so I won't forget. Aren't we red sun  
  distant  
after the funeral? Still we are  
crane, now, maybe bear-  
willows—consuming thick  
red muscle.

the soul is a

salmon

is the sun-

series on the sea

a thousand

suns

each upwelling is the soul

again

again

look

how the sea is today--so gentle

she sucks the pebbles

softly

lips round beads loosely

the sun shines the smooth rocks

wetted in her mouth

I will lift each salmon

I will lift them up

I will heft each soul

I will hold it up

chest high

the salmon's scales glint on my fingers

each scale a sun

how beautiful is this salmon, this salmon I hold in my hands

see its body, net-wrenched as it is

perfect

\*\*\*\*\*

this is how to unfold flesh—

we eat together, on the floor  
the red tablecloth beneath us.  
the enamel pans filled full--dense  
brown meat, pink flesh,  
salmon egg sacks, coffee cans  
shine with seal oil, gleam  
green with *syrah*, our hands  
reach down--the flesh flaking  
in our fingers.

                    she is smiling  
my Auka, laughing,  
her dark eyes gleaming.

*Agrepedin.*

*Sit down with us.*

*Syramic.* The seal oil is passed, poured out,

her fingers glisten

                    how brown her fingers

                                    how lovely the deep blue veins

**hawk-claw**

surely, like this, now,  
small-bird-my-heart,  
I have your attention.  
she is gone, the small woman,  
the sharp bird, body nested  
in thick pillows of moss.

## Motion

We're driving to the restaurant  
and we're not really awake.  
I look at the man in suspenders  
and I see America  
goes where she always goes  
at six a.m., to breakfast  
before dawn.

The old men  
at breakfast cannot say  
it anymore, in their white  
work shirts and blue  
union hats,  
they all want to say it,

*The white hairs are shaved from my face  
but I won't shower unless you've died.*

I listen like it's the scratchy radio  
on the way to the lake. On the last  
hill that I can hear NPR, Lourdes Garcia-Navarro says  
something about jihad.

The rocks polish  
their skulls in gravel, the retired hunters  
pull further left, red tail lights flicker.

It may be arduous to say after  
my throat gets caught on before  
and then is falling, I can't stand  
this window anymore.

He reads the obituaries,  
places appear without time.  
The spring chooshes beside me,  
the water bottle drips in my hand,  
my palm cups fresh blueberries,  
this hand holds the shattered red rock  
and that one the littered beer can.

The salmon swim in red defensive  
circles in the lake shallows, their mates  
lie dead on the shore. I see their round eyes,  
sometimes their hooked noses, their male bodies  
circle and circle.



**small-bird-my-heart**

she will reach me here  
at this fulminate desolation  
her light travels out from earth  
and I will see it.  
I would travel so forever,  
travel only  
in her times  
out along the length her light gleams out.

## First Saint

I was three when she died, but I remember her, Aunt Juliana. Looking at the records, it was a rough summer. My Aupa's parents died that summer. Mary Muktoiyuk, in June. Stanislaus followed her in July. And Julie died, too, in July. Mary was 86, Stanislaus 88, but Julie was only 31. Her death hit my grandparents hard. Julie was their first natural born child. They thought they couldn't have any children. They adopted their eldest, Aunt Yayuk, then right after they adopted Yayuk, Auka got pregnant with Julie.

I remember Julie before she got sick—she was tall, she had long black hair, black-brown eyes. She was beautiful. In my memory, she is always moving towards me, reaching down to pick me up. I remember her without sound. I can't remember her voice. I can't remember the sound of her step. I remember approaching Auka's house and she came down the porch steps, walked through mud, and swept me up. She was always smiling.

Julie got very sick. I remember asking Mom why she was sick. She said it was because Julie didn't take her medicine. As a kid, for a long time, I thought this was true. Then later, I asked Mom what really happened. It was stomach cancer.

In Auka's living room, there is a couch against one wall and a bed against the other. When we'd go over to visit, Julie would be lying on the bed. There was a green hospital pan on the floor next to her head and she would reach for it and vomit.

I think, as she got sicker, she started to sleep with Auka and Aupa in their bed. One of my last memories of Julie is being led into Auka and Aupa's bedroom, Julie was in the bed. She leaned down towards me and handed me a wrapped present. It was a Care Bear. The Love-a-Lot Bear, pink with two intertwining hearts embroidered on her stomach. She gave gifts to everyone as she was dying.

When I think about this now, when I think of her giving gifts as she lay dying, when I think of her generosity, I am moved.

Dad and Mark Weaver, Sr., a neighbor, built Julie's coffin. I remember running my finger along the dark brown smooth edge of it after they finished building it. It didn't make me sad, I understood she would be placed in it, but I didn't understand she was dead. I tossed dirt into the grave with everyone at the funeral.

Mom says Dad and Julie didn't get a long all that well. Julie was very bossy. Mom says Julie, Yayuk, and Loretta practically raised her and the younger kids. The summer after Julie's death, in June, my sister Carin Juliana was born. Auka and Aupa gave Carin Julie's Inupiaq name. Inupiaqs believe when the name of a deceased family member is given to a baby, the soul of the deceased is passed to the baby and the baby becomes that person and becomes a whole human being. My sister, Mom says, is a lot like Julie. She is strong-willed, she is bossy, and everyone feels what she is feeling around her. When Carin is being particularly bossy, Dad will say, "Julie, Julie," in a voice both loving and astonished. Dad loves Carin so much; they get along together really well. Love holds us all together.

Whenever Carin enters Auka and Aupa's house, Aupa looks up, a smile spreads over his entire face, his eyes light up, he catches his breath and says, "Juliana. Juliana." He'll laugh and beam as she walks over to greet him with a kiss. When Auka was still alive, she would smile at her, her eyes glowing. For a while after Carin entered the room, they couldn't take their eyes off of her.

Carin and I struggle to get along. Since I am older than her, I think I should be the bossy one. But she is indomitable. When I think of Julie and her generosity, I wish I treated Carin better, I wish I was kinder to her.

Years ago, just 6 months to a year after Aunt Loretta died, Julie's daughter came to visit. Her name is Nelenia. Julie adopted her out to a family who moved to Wasilla. Nelenia wanted to meet her extended birth family. She looks so much like Julie, dark crescent eyes and wide smile. She was the sun, our family orbited around her while she was visiting us. She looks so much like Julie. Auka watched her with love and shyness. Aupa laughed with joy every time he saw her. All us cousins wanted to always be hugging her.

**first saint (without sound)**

dark winter swept Julie's hair  
blue—winter lights shaken  
frost pollen green-gold  
she—always walking  
towards—forever reaching

down, her face of joy

a moon on her forehead, a star on her chin

she—the saint of longing  
to be near,

beckons (and stars. the winter browned flowers rise from the snow stiffly)

a pink bear

in hand. our voices rise Julie, Julie  
and her image

waves, our breath catches  
sail. watch the careful preparations

our hands make—the smooth  
corner of the box, the earth clumped  
and crumbled, falling broken  
from our hands.

she walks down the stairs (every motion, motions)

reaching—she walks through mud  
and sweeps me up, my nose

that sweep of night. in that sweep of winter  
but what quick exit.

return with stars, they will fall  
from your mouth (without suffering)  
we will gather every one, our palms  
shining, we will trace your every  
move forever in our minds.

## **hawk-claw**

she rests.  
her bones  
arch  
graceful.  
some beauty  
lies there,  
too.

## **All Her Breath is Gone**

the gnats swarm around my hood  
pulled tight around my glasses,  
the blueberries begin to droop  
on their branches, the rain  
drops cause leaves to cling  
to my fingers, the red leaves  
to my fingers, the red leaves  
in the white bucket, some berries  
taste sour to my tongue.  
the gnats bite my upper lip,  
but the water on my hands keeps  
them away from the blue veins  
and raw red knuckles. how quiet  
it is, how still, after the retired men  
drive by, hunting from their old blue  
trucks.

all her breath is gone  
from the curve of the bone  
white lichen antlers  
to the withered  
willow leaves,  
but we all cling

to the land and we say our  
prayers to the red  
salmon, scales breaking  
against the net,  
please don't take the long drink

on top of that hill,  
the gray hill there,  
to the left of the park sign,  
are rocks pressed down by some  
historic weight, now dissipated,  
crushed together, like tiles,  
herringbone patterned. I want  
to say that weight is still felt.

**small-bird-my-heart** waits at the edge of time

her fingers were

singular

each shedding light

on acts we should have acted on

if I had your sharp eyes,

hawk-claw, what would I see?

would I, if I could, telescope

through time to look

into her lovely ages

**hawk-claw**

I carry her with me  
everywhere. she,  
so deeply threaded  
holds the feathers  
to my skin.



## Second Saint

*Her hand at that angle suggests the verge  
and border. She has the look. She has  
the look.*

Examine her silk-screened image,  
I drew it out of my mind, her image too stolid to shimmer.

*flesh is the . . . how do I say it, the glory of*

Her image murmurs, I didn't catch it.  
Never ask her to repeat anything. Things  
are meant to be lost from language,

but images—*how can her T-shirt be that  
purple?*

or that wrinkled.

*her teeth,*

yes, they sit sideways  
to each other. Get a good look at the ones  
in the back, *comme les francais au cafe*  
they've had long conversations over cigarettes.

the sweets *qui sont impeccable ce matin*—listen—  
they've whole conversations they meant  
to at last expel, never meant to leave  
in mind. No, she wasn't really French, except  
her teeth. Look.

Her elbow is a whorl,  
an eddy, where her skin's deep waters  
show their power. The currents lead smooth  
into the breakwaters, her knuckles rise like waves,  
smooth into the lapping touch, oh, but she  
was strong as water.

She was. *See how high  
her curly hair rises, it expels all evil around her.*  
I know. I have seen it. But do not look, not now  
not until your gaze moves to her bare feet.

*They are cupped by air, just rising above the  
tile floor,*

the gray tiles splotted with mica.  
I don't mention she is sitting. These things  
aren't essential to the order of examination.  
Her calluses yellow, thick, her feet like roots  
drawing power.

*We must note the air beneath her feet  
is not shadowed.* Where would we find such  
shadows in her presence? She was such  
a lion such shadows scattered. I close my  
eyes, I see her in my mind, I know her  
look so well, I trace her legs,  
staunchly crossed, her jeans faded,  
ankle-frayed. Perhaps not staunchly  
crossed. Her belly rises to her breasts,  
crests there and slopes naturally to  
her shoulders, like mine, wide.

**hawk-claw**

her image is reaching the edge of earth's galaxy  
it will travel through the empty spaces  
those strange between  
the dark tracts  
the galaxy spirals do not touch  
her light  
is millions of years away

**small-bird-my-heart replies**

but I will wait

## **Auka,**

hello, beloved, after the dark  
has shadowed you, you are still fragile,  
fragile in your pajamas as the fall  
spreads its cold over the expanse of water  
and the crying crane  
V their way south.

I have flown south,  
beloved, my memories of summer grow dark,  
my crane  
breast grows fragile  
crying over waters,  
tears fall.

I fall  
from flight in dreams, fall south,  
the earth spinning, its waters  
blurring dark,  
your fragile  
face always craning

up at me before you disappear into that crane  
form, that graceful form falling,  
your fragile  
image wavering south  
as the sky grows dark,  
as the shadows grow across the water.

Across the water,  
I see you dance your crane  
dance, lift your dark  
wings and let them fall,  
rise and fall facing me, I am south  
and your cry so far, it reaches me so fragile.

The film over the waters, if fragile  
is beautiful, a filigree of lace over the waters,  
ice etching its way south,  
as delicate as the wavering crane  
falling  
into the dark,

the dark so fragile  
this fall, like a ripple on the water,  
I crane my face away from the south to seek you.

**small-bird-my-heart**

do you think, after this,  
I would lift my wings  
and go home?

## **The Berry Picker II**

She has brown hands with rivers deep and blue,  
she plucks the salmon berries from their stems,  
she moves, bent over, in and out of view.

The misty air with berry musk imbued.  
The orange globes blush between her fingertips.  
She has brown hands with rivers deep and blue.

I awake my sweater coated with dew,  
I thought I heard a bucket plunk, I dreamt,  
she moved, bent over, in and out of view.

With berries my bucket's laden, my heart with rue.  
Each berry pressed and bucketed repeats lament,  
she had brown hands with rivers deep and blue.

In sleep I seek her in that other world,  
I follow after, I trace her every step—  
she moves, bent over, in and out of view.

Am I still dreaming? My waking eyes confused,  
sometimes awake I swear I smell her scent.  
She has brown hands with rivers deep and blue.  
She moves, bent over, in and out of view.

**hawk-claw**

small-bird-my-heart

her image burns within you



### Third Saint

my lips touch your cheek—  
age-curved below high cheekbones,  
you are beautiful—you white hair  
rising. dear woman, I see how imperial  
you are, how fierce. why shouldn't  
you be, born Inupiaq and white in 1916,  
it just wasn't done. you lived chaffed  
between worlds. but you taunt back  
through time.

I study you, the left sag of your mouth,  
you are talking. your left hand rises  
index finger pointing. your hands—  
you know your hands, I know, but I must  
study them, you know, I must remember them  
now, I must speak of them, I must write of them,  
why?

your hands are worn. small, like mine,  
but yours have touched the warm interiors  
of so many animals—each animal speaks  
from each crease of your skin—I hear them  
their voices rise with your hands, their songs  
grow louder as you motion until their songs  
fill the room, until their presence fills the room,  
and you are calm in the presence of their voices,  
you hear them as you sit, your hands resting  
on your stomach, you hear them speaking,  
you hear their voices weave the stories  
of your husband and your sons and your daughters  
and your father and your mother and your grandparents  
and their parents, you hear the voices  
tie you together, all together.

all those songs, all those voices,  
all those souls sing through your body,  
making every part of you beautiful and whole.

and you are beautiful and you are whole.

O Catherine.

**small-bird-my-heart**

it is not enough,  
the press of her memory  
against each rib  
within me

## **hawk-claw prays**

she leaned over ocher—her hair  
shone—how deep  
brown it shone—

## Fifth Saint, Sixth & Seventh

*—for Gabriel Muktoyuk, Sr., Edward Muktoyuk, Sr., and Cecilia Muktoyuk*

Gabriel, sing great-grandpa's song,  
head thrown back, black hair gleaming  
gray at your temples. So handsome, you,  
great-uncle—my Uvah—I imagine my Aupa  
looked like you when he was younger,  
deep, dark skin and half-moon smile  
gleaming, you laugh the same laugh—huh huh huh huh!

Did your heart break, as his, leaving the island—  
he stayed an extra winter, left his eldest children  
in Nome for school, lived on Ugiuvak—the place for winter—with Auka  
and their smallest children—  
Mom, age four, was there—and that 65mm  
camera recording the last winter  
of his traditional life.

Recording that last winter to convince the BIA to send another teacher.

The film was ruined by the August storms.  
They wouldn't have watched it anyway.

Those fuckers.

O God, reading Aupa's accounts ruptures  
everything forever.

Aupa never sings.

But sing, Gabriel, sing, sing grandpa's song.

Mom and Aya Margaret will stand up to dance.  
We welcome everyone to dance with us.

\*\*\*\*\*

You all broke, I know, everyone shattered

deep,

Auka and Aupa and their sad kitchen life,  
eyes graying the straight, dusty streets of  
Nome.

Everybody lost themselves in drink for years.  
Some are still lost.

\*\*\*\*\*

Sing, Gabriel, sing.

How beautiful our women are—  
wearing floral ugithqoks,  
dancing—that passionate precision—  
your Frances, Auka, Marie, Mom, Margaret, Caroline, Marilyn,  
and your granddaughters—in a line—motions memorized.

And then, the song is over.  
They move back to their seats.

Please, Uvah, as we always do,  
sing the song again, a second time,  
and a second time they will stand up to dance.

## Sixth Saint

You have been meditating in silence a long time, Aupa.  
You sit on the couch, eschewing clothing—shirts, sometimes even  
pants. How often we come to visit and you are sitting  
in silence, your hands clasped over your bare  
stomach, fingers knotted over the center-line scar  
running up your breastbone riveted  
on each side by red-knot scars.

I read your book, it was heartbreaking.

What you must think of—so long sitting there—  
thirty years on the couch, retired in too many  
ways. *Sans patrie*—the BIA expelled you from your island—  
years, so many years away from home.

You are nearly deaf. You can read lips only if they speak Inupiaq.

There is so much I want to ask you.

You took a picture of yourself over 60  
years ago—how young and strong  
you stood, shoulders back, leaning  
against your harpoon.  
You stood on the ice,  
the crush of the free  
ice slammed against the shore  
ice—a pressure ridge—behind  
you. You wore your fur parka,  
with its white, winter-hunting  
canvas cover. Your Siberian  
seal hook in your hand, the rope  
circling round your arm and shoulder.

You taught Uncle Harry how to braid  
rope like that and I watched him sit  
at the work table, his summer-tanned  
hands working the nylon rope into  
a seamless loop. It was for the crab  
pots at the seafood plant. But your  
ropes were pulled and dried tendons.

You wrote the last time you killed  
a seal with your harpoon two men  
were there hunting with you who

were later hit by a drunk driver  
and killed in Nome. I don't believe anyone  
could hit anyone accidentally in Nome.  
But you didn't want to write about that.

As I watch you, suddenly, you stir, a beautiful light  
glows in your eyes, you smile, your  
white eyebrows raise, you start to speak.

*It was Christmas long, long ago, and the People gathered in the qagri—like the English word clubhouse, there was a men's qagri and a carving qagri and a communal qagri. Everybody got together then to celebrate Christmas. The priest and the school teachers were wrapping present for everyone in the school house. We ate aguutuk and we danced late into the night.*

You laugh. I watch you, Aupa, and your belly rises with laughter  
as the old times cast light through your form.

*We didn't get much news in back then. Before we got the radio in. We waited and heard news only once or twice a year. We didn't hear news all winter until we went by umiak over to the other villages. Then we'd hear who died and who was born, who got married. We'd get news from the outside world.*



**small-bird-my-heart on mortality**

why does this ache,  
this thing, this being  
that I am. why would I wait  
so long through time  
I can spend but once.

### **hawk-claw on mortality**

if I could spare any time  
for you, I would, but that  
is not a possible thread

**small-bird-my-heart: death shadowed deeply her blessed forms and thinks of future  
shades of mine**

ready  
this is the beginning  
maybe  
this is the wresting  
the un-handing  
she was a golden  
book wasn't she  
all dark leaved  
and glinting

what made this flourish  
this beauty  
garden-out like bounty  
when I hold my hands cupped  
each tiger glares out

of every ridge  
out of every furrow  
yellow teeth  
hard  
gripping  
pulling back  
essentials—my fingerprints—  
bent back  
devoured

if the body does this  
my body  
what does it mean  
again  
what does it mean

## Afterlife I

My Auka came to me in dreams, after she died. I was going crazy in D.C. I cried at the Dupont Circle Metro Station after I couldn't find a taxi to take me to my doctor's appointment. It'd been scheduled for a month. I'd injured my hip—I limped five blocks from apartment to metro station, four blocks from metro station to work for a month waiting for this appointment. Then I missed it. I couldn't take another damn metro mishap. I couldn't take another damn thing about D.C. It was a fucking mess the whole time I was there. The whole 10 months. I missed my appointment, and it was too much to take. I got back on the metro and went home—crying the whole way. I'd told work I would be in late to make this appointment. When I missed it, I got on the metro and said, Fuck the whole day. I got home to my husband; I was still crying. I started packing my bags and said, "I've got to fucking get out of here."

He asked, "Where you gonna go?"

I said, "I don't fucking know—to the airport—somewhere—I'll catch a flight home."

It didn't make sense, but it was the only thing I held onto the whole 45 minute ride from Dupont to Rockville station. I was going to go home to my apartment, pack my bag, and leave. God, I started folding my sweaters like I was really packing. I folded the arms back so they wouldn't crease. I packed a whole stack of them before my husband talked me down. I spent the whole day crying and then I went to sleep.

**small-bird-my-heart to hawk-claw**

what happened to her  
after I left  
what happened to her  
she was  
wasn't she  
the throat-catch of  
beauty tied to the terrible tigers

they were inseparable  
though I tried to  
I unfastened as many as I could  
but still they were so fast together

and me  
you see my tigers too  
I see you seeing them

please we do not have to know now  
do we  
do we always have to know  
know how inseparable  
until that last horrendous tear  
that rip

and all that light comes in

## Afterlife II

I dreamt of you, sad, still in the body  
I knew you in, the old woman's  
body. Sad on the creek bank  
where the Eskimo  
man gathered up the relics  
of his village, bound them  
in a leather sack to hide them  
in the melting snow. Just ahead of the train  
car full of Eskimo girls wearing 1900s  
school dress, returning home. It was spring.  
You looked at me (the creek was small  
between us, the land not different  
on either side, tundra, though mine  
had driftwood packed into  
the soil) and didn't say anything.

### **Afterlife III**

Months later, at your fish camp,  
Cape Woolley, when you showed  
me the crooked house, floor boards  
heaved, walls collapsing, you  
were happier. You said you left  
this house, this derelict, element  
beaten, crapshack to me in your will.  
I didn't understand. It was uninhabitable.  
You said, excited, I have to build  
my own frame; the side-boards are salvageable.

## **hawk-claw on mortality**

within that red weave  
each muscle is roped  
together

each rope crimped  
together with a golden  
crimp



**hawk-claw on small-bird-my-heart's beauty**

I see your glow, small-bird-my-heart,  
your luminescence  
stirred by unseen hand  
your bones reflect light  
in dark waters

## **Break the Dishes Over Her Barrow**

Into the old woman's house the cup,  
mug, flatware, do-dad boxes stacked.  
The two lanky sisters I saw with  
their mother at the thrift store lounged on

two old, for-sale chairs in front of pots full  
of ladles and wooden and metal straining  
and stirring spoons, whisks, and meat forks.  
As we drove up, their faces lifted and

the one in the oversized purple sweater  
straightened up, her lank hair swept  
over her shoulders, the smaller one  
shifted up, arms gripping the arm rests

of her chair. We got out, and smiled.  
We walked behind them to the table  
of look-past-them mugs, the girls' owl  
necks turned their heads behind their backs

to watch us clank through ceramic  
bowls—"There's more in the house,"  
they said. "Oh, is there?" We replied,  
and went inside, past the soup pots—

enamel black and white spot, stainless,  
aluminum, rusted. Inside, their mother  
smiled in the stacks of old purses, old,  
old purses, cracked plastic leather, and

one-shoed mismatched tennis and aged  
dress-leather shoes. A small round table,  
formicaed (like our first kitchen table  
for the years when there were only four

or five of us) and covered in yellow bowls  
and red bowls and small mismatched bowls  
with roosters or Chinese letters or blue  
Danish paint, stacked high and precarious.

I wanted the yellow bowls that look like  
Auka's yellow mixing bowls, Mom wanted  
the soup pots for planting her kale  
and lettuce and Swiss chard, grown beneath

the plastic through three-month summer  
and month long fall. Behind the table  
an aluminum samovar, in the sink  
dirty dishes, on the rack dry ones.

“Are these all for sale?” I asked. She nodded,  
“Yep, we’ve got to sell all the stuff before  
we can move in. She said, “There’s more  
in the bedroom.” It was so small, the bed

looked so small, the walls worn, the window  
light dusty, and the green army blanket  
seemed to sum it up. I didn’t have  
the heart to catalog it all. I stacked

the bowls I garnered, the cooking pot set still  
in plastic. I asked the mother, “How much  
for all of this?” She said, “Make an offer.”  
I looked at Mom, “Twenty-five?” The woman  
said, “Sure.”

We didn’t ask about the old  
woman, whether she moved, whether she died,  
we drove home and washed the weevils  
out of the dishes, washed the dust.

We didn’t ask, but I wondered what  
bone broke or what emptiness (the firewood  
box, the cupboard, the ash  
tray in the sink) or what lapse lifted  
her from her house, shook  
out her memory of things and place, unlinked  
property and set her down—her hand still reaching  
for the stirring spoon, her feet still sliding  
into her slippers, her fingers still tracing  
the outside rim of the blue bowl—

**hawk-claw rouses small-bird-my-heart**

can you remember it  
can your opaque eyes  
still see it clearly?  
that is your mind  
is it still clear  
is it that festoon  
is it that high column  
that beauty and support

**small-bird-my-heart to hawk-claw: it was as if she was falling**

but she cast a circle as she fell

she cast it fairly well, though it drooped  
it listed as it struck her elbow  
spun orbitally forever after

as Io as Ganymede do list do wobble

as I weave her story, cast it, some words catching the cloth roughly

listen! she was graceful, she took the off-spun circle and she made it work.

how we watched

how we could not keep our eyes from gazing

our eyes like planets  
spun around her

this isn't how it ends, this isn't how it ends, believe me.  
there was a star burst, hazy morning could not keep it in, each spectral sparkle  
fell like this (EXPLODE THE GLITTER MADLY)

won't you listen, won't you hear how this makes it well, makes it well

up the words, like a far-thing sought after

or a feather

as she preens, her black beak

the serrated beak catching each filament

her eye is a black bead in golden setting

oh star, beloved star. I will catch that mossy smell

I will catch that smoky smell,

I will linger until I catch that smell.

relax, I am not mad, this is not madness, this is not, I will speak to the point.

when she rises

the blue of her back will catch

light like arches

will catch light like arches arches arches

arches arches will cover her back

will weave a story

will weave a love story

will weave a story over her back

trace each story with your finger

beloved, each story is beloved, each story is

her eye's dark pupil set in gold

**small-bird-my-heart addresses her beloved**

each story will trace its way back to you

will tug your sleeve

will look into your eyes

will ask your blessing

**hawk-claw**

it was enough to know her once

**small-bird-my-heart**

gazed into them  
the lands are without acre  
without tract

and grief also



## **hawk-claw**

grief is a bridge

each cable twisted storing up the downward force  
the dizzying force resounds off the water  
    spirals off the water  
        in ever-casting-vision tunnels down  
            the wind making shadows as it falls  
                (or was it the sweeping eyelashes in the wind)

**small-bird-my-heart prays**

she leaned over ocher—her hair  
shone—how deep  
brown it shone—

## **The Soul's Silver Side is Speckled Black**

scales hinged, fastened, indented into the soul's  
skin. a horizontal shadow greens its back.  
the soul has pink serrated gills to filter air  
the soul sometimes deep at sea

searches—a sharp tail flick—zips hard—  
muscles rip electric—gills timpani—silk  
heart surges—air bladder expands—then sky

whiplash-body arcs—  
tail-water ripples down—

gripped in teeth—body crushed between palette  
and sleek blue tongue—an insect—marooned  
by wind gust—exoskeleton cracked between  
the soul's small, even teeth.

the soul's eye does not blink  
sees everything  
from the moment it hatches—shivers  
into form  
what is remembered from all these things  
what in all that depth most beautiful  
most sacred

in your unfolding, sacred soul  
when I bear this knife down upon your spine  
hear my prayers  
for everyone I love, I love the best I can  
I loved her, bear this message to her, if you can.

## Auka

I hope it's an island with the indigo waters,

beloved, where you are. May your cabin  
be lit and warm, hold your children  
to your breast (they were too long  
away from you), and watch for me. I will  
come in a boat loaded with bread  
and milk and meat. It will be so full.  
We will drink tea. We will watch  
the terns and seagulls from the seaward  
window. In the summer you will be young,  
your body lithe, you will climb  
the cliffs to the puffin, Murre, and seagull  
nests. You will carry their cone-shaped eggs  
home in your pockets—hollow them out—  
the blue eggs speckled with black—string  
them—knot them—hang them  
from the rafters—fragile globes—read  
my fortune in their marks—what joy,  
what sorrow separates me from you.  
In winter, if it is in winter, I will set  
out by sledge. I will be sure  
to bring a seal home for you to dress.

I will be sure at last to catch  
my breath when I first see you.

**hawk-claw**

how long will you wait here

**small-bird-my-heart**

until she comes